

***Khao yam* Violence: A Survey of Some of the Factors Contributing to the Violence in Southern Thailand**

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On a recent visit to Pattani in March 2004, I asked a Muslim professor there about the precipitating violence in the Muslim dominated southern Thai provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. “What’s happening here? Who’s behind the spate of violence that we’ve experienced recently? (i.e. since the January 4 2004 raid on the military camp in Narathiwat)” He replied to my questions with one phrase “*khao yam*.”

Khao yam translates as rice salad and has a northern Malaysian counterpart in the Kelantanese *nasi kerabu*. This dish has rice mixed with a variety of chopped fresh vegetables and herbs and it is served with *naam budu* (a thick fish sauce which is produced in fishing villages in southern Thailand) and lime and chili sauce. As the photo caption below says, *khao yam* is “unusual, elegant and very typical of southern Thailand.”



David Henley/ CPA
'Kao Yam Pak Tai', a Southern treat.

Khao yam pak tai—an intriguing breakfast salad. The presentation is exquisite. A small pile of fragrant boiled rice, accompanied by finely chopped heaps of lemon grass, bean sprouts, long beans, sour mango and chopped *makrut* or kaffir lime is served with spicy chilli pepper, budu with fresh lime and a piquant sweet-sour sauce. It’s unusual, elegant, and very typical of southern Thailand.

We can also read of the violence in the Muslim-dominated southern Thai provinces as akin to *khao yam*—a mixture of many different ingredients resulting in a presentation so unusual, elegant and very typically southern Thai. In this paper, I analyze the different “ingredients” that constitute the regional southern Thai feast of violence and terror.

While the Thai government has constantly and consistently assigned all blame for the violence in the south to Muslim separatists and Muslim militants, evidence reveals that there is no one mastermind to the violent activities in the south. Instead many interest groups operate, often independently of each other, to create a climate of fear and terror that has negatively affected both Muslims and Buddhists in the region. Until and unless the Thai state admits to the *khao yam*-like nature of the violence recipe in the south and in so doing halts its “all-Muslims-are-terrorists” campaign of retaliation, it is unlikely that peace will prevail in the south in the near future.

The Ghost of Separatism

The anchoring ingredient of *khao yam* is the fragrant boiled rice. It forms the base onto which other ingredients are added. Without this ingredient, one will not have *khao yam*.

The discourse of violence in the Muslim provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat in southern Thailand takes its anchor from what I call the “ghost of separatism.” Any and every official discussion on the violence in the south is tagged onto this apparitional entity which is constantly resurrected to take blame for the violence in the south. This ghost of separatism is fed by the history of the more than two decades old (from the early 1960s to the late 1980s) separatist war between the Thai state and Malay-Muslim separatist rebels in the south. Despite the fact that separatism is no longer a viable political alternative in present-day Thailand,¹⁾ it continues to haunt the region and it becomes the scapegoat for blame.

In my article entitled “The Ghost of Separatism Revived,”²⁾ I examine how despite the waxing and waning of its influence and activities in Thailand, the Malay-Muslim separatist movement of Thailand has been blamed for almost every violent act perpetrated in the region and Malay-Muslim separatists are portrayed as perpetual threats to the sovereign Thai state. The history of separatism in the Muslim region of southern Thailand means that separatists become the convenient ghosts, not only of blame and censure, but more importantly to facilitate the periodic recreation of the myth of the integrity of the nation-state. By present a constant threat to its existence and by extension to its citizens, the nation-state seeks to evoke the loyalty of its citizens. At the same time, the ghost of separatism allows for the state to suppress and censure certain elements in society by labeling them separatists. As a result, even when the separatist movement may no longer be viable, the nation-state will keep it alive and well in order to call attention to its citizens to constantly support the existence of the nation-state and by extension, maintain the supremacy of the state and its rulers.

Why does the state need to engage in this exorcism? What premises necessitate the creation and maintenance of such a spooky myth?

From the perspective of the Thai state and Thai-Buddhists, the territory that comprises the Muslim dominated provinces (once the old kingdom of Patani) was conquered land which was rightfully won in a war waged by the Siamese monarchs and ultimately incorporated as a rightful part of the independent Thai state following the Anglo-Thai treaty of 1909. Prior to this, the kingdom of Patani had maintained a tributary relationship with its more powerful overlord, the Siamese monarch. This system of tributary payments continued even after the conquest of Patani by the Siamese monarch in 1786. The introduction of the *thesaphiban* or direct system of administration in the

1890s eliminated this suzerain-vassal relationship and caused the Malay-Muslim provinces to come directly under the administrative control of the central government.³⁾ The treaty of 1909 sealed the fate of this region as an indisputable part of modern nation-state of Thailand by effectively introducing national and international territorial and sovereignty boundaries between Thailand and Malaysia.

From the Thai-Malay perspective, they represent a defeated people who were incorporated into the Thai kingdom following the expansionary wars of the Siamese monarchs. As members of the Malay race and as followers of Islam, they felt themselves different and separate from their Thai-Buddhist conquerors. The defeat of the Malay kingdom of Patani meant the wresting of political and economic power from the hands of the Malay nobility and the re-location of these powers in the hands of the predominantly Thai-Buddhist bureaucratic officials. The charge of siphoning wealth from the resource-rich Thai-Malay states⁴⁾ to fill the coffers of the Bangkok-based central state became rallying points in the separatist war against Thailand.⁵⁾ The governing of a defeated people, which Thailand carried out through forced attempts at assimilating the Malay-Muslims through education in the Thai language, the privileging of Thai over the Malay language as well as the denigration of Islam by Thai-Buddhist officials and teachers⁶⁾, gave rise to clear boundaries between the Muslims and their Buddhist conquerors and added to the cause of separatism. The notion of Bangkok as an occupying force in the south remains till today as seen in the strategies and actions employed by different Thai-Buddhist administrations with deal with the Malay-Muslims in the south, argues historian Tamara Loos⁷⁾.

To Thai-Buddhists, on the other hand, the notion of the old kingdom of Patani as being territory separate from Thailand does not exist. The history of the creation of the nation-state of Thailand is founded upon fear, as Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul argues in his famous work *Siam Mapped*⁸⁾. Though never formally colonized, the physical geo-body of the Thai nation-state was formed by a series of treaties initiated by the French colonial governments of Vietnam and Laos and the British colonial governments of Burma and Malaya. The fear of losing further territory seen in the red enemy of communism to the east in the countries of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and the colonial British power to the west (Burma) and south (Malaya) led to the creation of a Thai self that had to oppose itself to Other selves, namely Mon, Karen, Shan, Lao, Hmong, Khmer or Malay. Thais of different ethnicities were expected to privilege their national identity over their ethnicity, especially when this ethnicity was seen as a potential threat to national sovereignty. Anthropologist Andrew Cornish⁹⁾ gives an ethnographic account of this fear as portrayed in an army concert in the southern Thai Muslim province of Yala.

The concert was a mixture of light comedy and popular songs, but had a serious finale in which the performers depicted Thai history in front of a large map of Thailand. The map at first showed the borders of Thailand extending over much of Southeast Asia, but as the narrator spoke actors in various foreign costumes strode onto the stage to steal successive pieces of the map and run away with them. The narrator explained how the Thais were a people constantly under threat, who needed to be constantly vigilant against attempts to steal their territory. One of the stolen segments comprised the whole of present-day peninsular Malaysia, and the southern

border region where Yala is located was specifically indicated as one of those areas still under threat.

In the case of the south, by identifying as Malays, these southern Muslims living at the border possessed the potential to identify with another nation-state, namely Malaysia. The history of separatism whereby the expressed goal of some separatist groups was to secede from Thailand and become part of Malaysia then made the Thai-Malays a potential threat to the nation-state of Thailand. This fear then forms the root of the ghost of separatism that dominates the discourse of violence in southern Thailand. Despite the fact that separatism is no longer an actively espoused ideology among the Muslims of southern Thailand, it is actively kept alive by the Thai-Buddhist state and administration and used as an effective tool of governance.

Mercenary criminals

Just like the chopped bean sprouts that give *khao yam* a nice crunchy flavor without being too overpowering, a not too potent ingredient to the violent spectacle in southern Thailand is the mercenary criminal. They are known as *nak leng*¹⁰⁾ in Thai and *oghe deber* in Pattani Malay which roughly translates to mean “gangster.” Many of them are ordinary southerners from depressed backgrounds. We also find among them, ex-separatists who upon being granted amnesty by the Thai government, renounced their separatist affiliation and returned to their homes in Thailand. Having been exposed to a life of offensive action, they became hired hitmen (assassins) and gunmen and body guards for a variety of influential men who needed protection and other security jobs to be done¹¹⁾.

Working as hitmen is a lucrative occupation, as many Thai-Buddhists and Malays engage in *bubuh peringkat*. Meaning “up one’s status,” this phenomenon was highly characteristic of southern Thai society, said a Muslim informant. Often men of prestige (*phuu yay*, literally meaning “big men” in Thai) would try to eliminate rivals in order to maintain supremacy in the society. Their ability to wipe out opposition to their position means that they are able to attract more “followers” who do their bidding. Such “people power” enables them to control access to a wide variety of making interests, further adding to their economic and political power. In my research village, such status contestations took place in the late 1980s when men occupying the positions of village headman (*kamnan*) and village big men (*phu yay baan*) were killed, often by assassins hired by the other, so as to assert their status and establish their dominion in the village. These status contestation killings ended when the family of the slain *phu yay baan* left the village to return to the wife’s family in another province. Villagers told me that these status killings were often blamed on separatists since those killed were village officials and hence civil servants. However, the real killers were never caught since the security officers were looking for the wrong men, said the villagers.

The activities of the mercenary criminals who carry out the biddings of men of prestige have always been an aspect of the violent landscape in the Muslim provinces of southern Thailand. These mercenary criminals are the foot soldiers of the *phuu yay* or influential men and they carry out the biddings of their powerful employers. Such jobs assigned to them are often violent in nature and their activities add to the highly diverse drama of

violence in the south. Despite the fact that the activities of these mercenary criminals are more pervasive and sustained than those of separatists, yet the blame for all violent acts is often placed on the separatists who are seen as the quintessential criminals of the Muslim south of Thailand

Local warlords

Another ingredient in the *khao yam* dish is sour or the unripe green mango. This is chopped into small bits and when added to the rice, it gives a contrasting sour taste that mingles with the other tastes that adorn the dish. Just like the sour mango that mixes with the dish to complement the other tastes present, there are local warlords in the south who blend in with the population and do their share to control vice activities in the region.

They control brothels, bars, big businesses, smuggling rings and the drug trade. Many of the local warlords are the *phuu yai* I referred to above and they are often the bosses of many mercenary criminals. I have been told that illegal operations of some of the local warlords are quite elaborately organized. With potential access to huge profits, turf wars and animosities are common and these add to the kaleidoscope of violence in the south. A Muslim official of the now defunct Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC) told me that a local mafia operates in the Betong area in Yala province. This mafia is controlled by Chinese but the hired guns are local Thai-Malays. The activities of these local warlords are more routine and routinized compared to those of separatists who violent activities are seasonal. In fact, much of the violence in the Muslim south can be attributed to the activities of the local warlords.

Petty criminals

The local warlords and the mercenary criminals are often dependent on each other but petty criminals are ordinary criminals who steal, kill, push drugs or engage in other criminal activities. They are independent crime operators who do not work for or report to a criminal warlord.

Because reports of a higher level of common banditry in southern Thailand much more than in other areas of the kingdom has been reported, this makes it difficult to differentiate between lawless activities committed by criminals or terrorist activities commissioned by separatist movements or other groups with vested interests in creating mayhem in the region.

It is interesting though how such common banditry is often linked to the separatist ghosts in Thailand. In one incident in 2000, the sons of a well-to-do Buddhist businessman were kidnapped and held for ransom by Muslims.¹²⁾ When the father refused to accede to the ransom demands written in Malay language, the two boys were beheaded. The newspapers were rife with the “Abu Sayyaf-style assassination” (quote Bangkok Post), insinuating Thai-Muslim separatists with possible links with the militant Filipino Muslim separatist group. Often such “axes of terror” are imagined of the Thai-Malays in southern Thailand.

Royal Thai Army

Without accompanying sauces, the bland dry rice with raw vegetables will not taste good. In fact the sauces are essential ingredients to a delicious *khao yam*. In the discourse

of southern Thai violence, the spicy chili sauce may be seen as the army.

Thailand's military outfit, the Royal Thai Army, is divided into four regional units to deal with security issues in each of these geographical regions. The 1st Army Region comprises central Thailand, the 2nd Army Region covers the northeast while the 3rd Army Region extends into the north and northwest of the country.¹³⁾ In the southern part of the country, the 4th army, the southern regional arm of the Royal Thai Army stretching from Chumpon and Ranong to the Thai-Malaysian border with regional headquarters in Nakorn Si Thammarat, is charged with maintaining order and security in the region together with the Civil Police Military Task Force (CPM) 43.¹⁴⁾ The two main security threats in the southern region have been the active Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and the Muslim separatists.

The Civilian Police Military Task Force 43 (CPM 43), a counter-terrorist outfit based in Yala, was the one remaining interagency task force left over from the successful counter-insurgency days of the late 1970s and the up through the mid-1980s. The CPM, modeled after the British government's efforts to defeat Malayan communists, combined civil, military and police tactics while emphasizing the political and military aspects of the operations to defeat communist insurgents.¹⁵⁾ However, following the defeat of the CPT and Malayan Communist Party (MCP) elements in the South circa 1985, CPM 43 continued to prove its usefulness to the Thai Government by being able to apply the same 66/23 and 66/25 principles that had proved highly effective with the communists to the problems of Muslim separatism and organized violent activities by criminal elements in the name of Muslim separatism and or terrorist groups.¹⁶⁾ In July 1998, another order was issued, the Prime Minister's Office Order 127/2541 to allow separatists who had fled abroad to return to Thailand without facing charges as long as they did not have criminal records.¹⁷⁾

Orders 66/23 and 66/25 were put into effect by the Yala-based CPM 43. Particularly effective in rural areas and in the open spaces of national parks, CPM 43 tied together the diverse elements of the Border Patrol Police,¹⁸⁾ *Thahaan Phran* or civilian mercenaries also known as Rangers, and regular Thai Army Troops and Air Force and or Navy elements when needed.¹⁹⁾ Additionally, CPM 43 was also tied into the larger intelligence apparatus of the Thai Military, which through several different organizations including the Armed forces Security Center as well as several three numbered directorates of the Army Operations Center in Bangkok, maintained several very large and effective agent networks, which were tied into many of the Muslim and criminal communities located throughout the region. Many of these intelligence networks leveraged the good will, which had earlier been established with countless individuals during the Counter-Insurgency period in which individual CPM, CPT and Muslim Separatists combatants were treated with dignity when they surrendered to Thai Government forces and were given an allocation of land to farm and a full return to the civil rights as Thai Citizens. Also tied into this structure was the very successful Royal Projects system, which first began by the Royal Family in the South (due to King Bumiphol's intense interest in finding ways to successfully combat the various insurgencies), and later was expanded to other regions. Under the Royal Projects mandate, Army units were given funding directly by the Royal Family to construct, maintain and to train the local populace on the operation of humanitarian based projects such as schools in rural areas and dams and

other type infrastructure construction endeavors. Additionally, the Border Patrol Police (BPP), which was under the operational control of the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Provincial Police for the Southern Region were also part of the ISOC/CPM 43 structure. Last but not least the Provincial Governors were also tasked to support the ISOC/CPM structure.

However, the security agencies charged with restoring peace to the region have themselves been responsible for some of the violence in the region. For example, the *thahan pran* or Rangers stationed in the south have been especially noted for their brutality²⁰. For example, in November 1987, Rangers from the 43rd Regiment at Cho Airong in Narathiwat killed four unarmed Muslims, shooting them in the backs and heads after rounding them up in Yala. The commander of the regiment tried to conceal the incident by claiming that the Muslims had been killed in a clash with the Communist Party of Malaya but statements to the contrary from the victims relatives led to the transfer of the commander²¹. On the other hand, Rangers from the 41st Regiment have focused on intelligence collection and civic action programmes including planting fruits and vegetables, constructing fish ponds, and building chicken farms. On August 20, 2002, the Regiment began a bamboo planting project in Raman district in Yala. It represented Yala in a national water resource competition in 2000 and won first place²².

While itself responsible for some of the violent acts perpetrated against the Muslims, the Army through its CPM 43, did at least maintain control throughout the years over the situation in the south while working with other Thai Government agencies.

However, in early April 2002, following Thaksin's decision to turn over the responsibility of security in the region to the Thai Police, the wheels began to come off in terms of order and security throughout the Muslim south.

Another move by the Thaksin government was to dismantle the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC). The SBPAC was a major administrative body, which was established one step above the provincial governor level and was assigned the overall administrative responsibility over all of the five provinces within the Southern region (viz. Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla). Originally established to help support the overall counter-insurgency effort during the mid 1980s, the Center proved to be most useful after the CPT and CPM insurgencies were defeated in managing the Thai Government's response to violent activities by various Thai Muslim separatist groups, any terrorist type activities and or criminal activities by any group or groups conducted in the region. Additionally, the Center was well known throughout the South for being able to listen to complaints from southern Muslims concerning corrupt or inept Thai Government officials and was believed to be able to order the transfer any civilian senior government or military official within 24 hours if the complaints were proven to be accurate. While operated by the Ministry of the Interior, the Center was also staffed by officials from agencies throughout the Royal Thai Government and the Ministry of Defense.

At the same time when the SBPAC was dismantled, CPM 43 was dissolved and its Combined Force disbanded on May 1, 2002, following a direct order from the Prime Minister's Office²³. The deactivation of the Ministry of Interior's SBPAC along with the transfer of all responsibility for security in the entire region from the Royal Thai Army's 4th Army Region to the Thai Police marked the beginning of a new spate of killings and

violence in the south. The transfer marked the removal of an old but proven and effective Thai government apparatus, which had successfully managed the specter of violence which has plagued the region for many years. The SBPAC had also been instrumental in orchestrating the transition from widespread insurgent and separatist activity for over fifteen years to a peaceful one. It had, in the process, also greatly improved the dialogue between the Thai government and the largely Muslim population. While not perfect, this structure had nevertheless begun to successfully integrate the largely Muslim population into the Thai mainline political and business communities, something even the most inventive Muslim ideologically based propaganda could not do.

However, many army officials did not merely focus on their job of intelligence gathering and security in the region. They began to engage in money-making deals like other corrupt government agency officials. Soldiers have been arrested for stealing weapons from the army which were sold for good money and later sent to aid the militants fighting in Aceh and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka.²⁴⁾ In fact, Thaksin himself made the claim that the salary of a soldier of 6000 baht a month is too little and may cause him to indulge in corrupt activities. The removal of power from the army to be placed in the hands of the police is also seen as a turf war and the army that lost power as well as spoils from the region was seen as itching to return to the region.

The Thai Police

Another essential sauce to add to the taste of *khao yam* is budu. The police in the south represent another essential peace-keeping unit but they were never charged directly with security matters in the south. Having removed the army, Thaksin put in its place a corrupt Thai Provincial Police structure whose only claim to fame to date lies primarily in the large percentage of its officers who have been implicated in corrupt or illegal narcotics activities in other regions.

The police forces stationed in the southern region were united under the command of the Police Region 9, under the Ministry of Interior and responsible for police functions in the urban communities in the southernmost provinces²⁵⁾. The southern Thai border provinces comprising the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla have long been known to serve as a dumping ground for corrupt and/or incompetent civilian and military officials, a trend that has alienated the local population from the central government. Many of these officials are not from the region, have little understanding or respect for the ways of the local people and are seen as removed from the local affairs. I myself have been privy to such events and comments from the non-Muslim officials who complain about the poor command of the Thai language among the rural Malays, saying that they cannot speak Thai despite being Thai. Despite the prejudice against the local Muslims and because the local Muslims, who are the majority population, are removed from close relations with the state officials, this environment offers the perfect chance to take advantage and gain material benefits. Muslims often hurl charges at the local bribe-ridden police force for turning a blind eye to offences committed by those who can pay their way out of legal punishment. Police in the south are charged with order there. They were especially put in charge after Thaksin dismantled the SBPAC and the 43rd Military Command. They get a lot of perks being there. They are known to receive bribes from the criminals. The border patrol police

make a lot of money in the south from collecting payments from illegal smugglers. At the same time, commercial boat owners pay big sums to the police to secure the release of those crewmen caught for illegal push-net and trawler fishing.

On December 24, 2001, five policemen and a defence volunteer were killed in a series of near simultaneous attacks on police outposts in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The 43rd Regiment of the Army was called in to deal with this problem. With this resurgence of violence, both military and police have accused each other for the violence in the region. According to a 50-page report by CPM 43, “local police were largely to blame for the troubles [in the Muslim south as] some police were tied in with influential figures and involved in illegal businesses such as drugs, contraband and prostitution [and that] police killings stemmed from personal conflicts between the slain officers and local people.”²⁶⁾ The Police Region 9 commander, Police Lt. Gen. Thawatchai Jonsukhon, warned that the military presence was no longer required in the southern provinces as the “separatist movements were scattered and no longer posed a threat”. On March 24, 2004, it was reported that the deputy chief of the national police would ask the Prime Minister to remove two southern-based military ranger units for their alleged involvement in the murders of police officers.²⁷⁾ In the meantime, General Kittirattanachaya, a former commander of the 4th Army suggested that replacing soldiers in charge of maintaining security with the police had led to the escalation of violence since police were not trained to fight terrorists.²⁸⁾ Again, the fear of terrorists and the ghost of separatism are invoked to bring the army back to its “rightful” place in the south.

This “turf war” between the police and military is seen by many to have contributed to the violence in the area.²⁹⁾ The war was particularly set off by the fact that the south, like other border regions was the site of lucrative businesses including many illegal ones such as smuggling of rice, people, drugs, arms, consumer goods and trade in contraband as well as prostitution. Phongpaichit and Baker³⁰⁾ report that the army and police in the south, in cahoots with local politicians and gangsters, were part of the illegal racket. While the rivalries between the two uniformed groups were neutralized in 1995–96 with the formation of the joint police-army command, Thaksin’s dismantling of both the police and army hierarchies upon assuming power caused the army and police to engage in “open propaganda warfare, accusing each other of running drugs, smuggling, prostitutions and other rackets.”³¹⁾

In fact, the rivalry between the police and the army has been exploited by some to their advantage. Katherine Bowie³²⁾ writing about the organization of the Village Scouts movement in Thailand, shows how the shift in the Thai King’s loyalties from the Thai army to the police which had traditionally seen itself as protector of the King in the 1970s won him support from the popular mass.

It is clear that both the military and the police have effectively used their power for access to various benefits. The turf war between these two groups of custodians of peace and security is itself seen to have contributed to the escalation of violence in the region. In doing so, they have “covered their tracks” by often attributing all violent acts to separatists. Since they represent the official voices of the state of security in the nation, their claims about separatist activities are seldom challenged and they form the official opinion on terror in the region.

Thaksin Shinawatra

The Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was elected to the premiership in February 2001. He is the first Thai premier to have won two terms in office. No previous elected premier survived one.³³⁾ Unlike other premiers who were not big businessmen, Thaksin Shinawatra, the richest man in Thailand, began to introduce business principles into political administration. In this, he sought to run the state like a big business with profit motives than as an administrative polity with people in it. He became a “CEO Prime Minister.” In their most recent book, *Thaksin: The Politics of Business in Thailand* (2004), Thai academics Phongpaichit and Baker explained what Thaksin did to create a CEO administration.

He [Thaksin] claimed the methods of business management were superior to the traditional practice of bureaucracy or government. He lectured the Cabinet on the latest management theory. He launched schemes to convert diplomats and provincial governors into “CEO diplomats” and “CEO governors,” meaning they were to prioritize their role in assisting economic growth.³⁴⁾

His CEO style of government, run on business principles that set targets for achievements of objectives, saw him set deadlines for work that had to be done including the handling of the violence in the south. Setting deadlines focused on the end result and failed to interrogate issues deeply so as to get a better understanding as to, for example, the roots and causes of the violence in the south. An important outcome of the CEO style of government was strongly entrenched rule since economic stability was very much dependent on political stability. By dismantling the army and border patrol police in the southern region, Thaksin wanted to remove the negative image of the south to encourage foreign investment. One such ambitious project was the gas pipeline project construction to supply LNG from Songkhla province in the south to Malaysia. Another was the establishment of a *halal* food processing center in Pattani with the aim of turning the coastal south into a seafood processing center as well as a tourism site.

As seen from the above discussion, however, Thaksin’s attempt to deregulate security in southern Thailand contributed to the perpetuation of more violence. It is not surprising that this “iron-grip Prime Minister” would have provoked opposition to his campaign especially in the south which has always been a stronghold of the Democrat Party. In fact, the violent events in the south which saw a steady increase ever since Mr. Thaksin took charge of the government was earlier seen as ploys to discredit Thaksin’s government.

Mercenary separatists

Mercenary separatists refer to those young men who are paid by separatist groups based outside of Thailand, especially Malaysia, to sometimes leave bombs, torch schools, etc. These violent activities, which were a frequent occurrence during the height of the separatist violence in the 1970s and 1980s, are re-enacted as a reminder to the Thai state that the separatists are still intent on their ideology. Mercenary separatists are not usually personally convinced by the separatist ideology. Instead, they use the payment they receive for carrying out these violent acts to finance their drug habits and other

leisurely activities. Many of the young men who are recruited for such activities are either jobless youth in Thailand or they go to work as illegal aliens in Malaysia. Since their illegal status exposes them to the threat of arrest, imprisonment and deportation, these young men sometimes join the separatist groups based in Malaysia whose members offer protection by informing these illegal workers of impending raids by immigration officials. The illegal workers then return the favor by carrying out violent acts for the separatist groups.

Often, the money collected from innocent victims in the name of separatism was used to support their drug habits. In fact, newspaper reports allege that separatist organizations actually hire drug addicts to terrorist activities in the south.³⁵⁾ One newspaper article reported that ‘separatists had introduced drugs into Muslim communities, especially in the three provinces and once the poor residents became addicted, they were made to work for the gangs.’

Besides the youth, there were also those who used their separatist past to their advantage by turning extortionists. In fact, even ordinary thieves and criminals invoked the ‘ghost of separatism’ to claim rewards for themselves. For example, one Thai Malay-Muslim villager told me the following tale.

There was this Chinese businessman who came to build a shrimp farm on the piece of vacant land near the village. I went to him and told him that the area was controlled by a PULO member and he had to pay protection money in order to operate his farm without molestation. In order to make it look real, I took him to Malaysia, blindfolded him after we got off the train and took him to meet with my PULO friends in Kota Bahru. The Chinese fellow paid a handsome sum of money and my friends and I split it.

(66-year-old informant, Pattani)

These reward-motivated separatists, who are paid to carry out the violent acts on behalf of the separatist organizations based in Malaysia, are what perpetuate the urban legend of the ghost of separatism. They serve to remind the state that the “separatist threat” is still present³⁶⁾ and are therefore unwittingly responsible for the maintenance of a regional security force charged with peace in the south—a security force that itself is an active contributor to the spectacle of terror in the south with the aim of exploiting spoils in the region.

Separatists

As I have stated in an earlier paper,³⁷⁾ Thai-Malay separatists are not active in Thailand. The greater majority are found in Malaysia.

Among the separatists based outside of Malaysia we find several types. The common feature they share is that they belong to the organized separatist groups such as PULO (Pattani United Liberation Organization), BRN (Barisan Revolusi Nasional), BNPP (Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Pattani) and more recently, the GMIP (Gerakan *Mujahidin* Islam Pattani).

The grassroots separatists comprised mostly petty criminals or gangsters (*orang deber* in Malay) who had committed petty crimes in Thailand and escaped to Malaysia where they

met with their fellow countrymen who were members of separatist organizations and who recruited them. The affiliation of these *orang deber* with the separatist organizations protected them from the Malaysian authorities since many of the separatist leaders had close connections with the Malaysian police and politicians and therefore could protect their members from arrest or harassment. Many of these grassroots separatists often occupied the lower levels of the separatist organizations, i.e. they were often the foot soldiers. Several ex-grassroots separatists that I interviewed told me that they often never met with or had knowledge of the leaders of the separatist groups. They often received their orders from “middlemen” and carried out what they were told. Many of these foot soldiers often lived in Malaysia without legal documents as they could not get Malaysian passports easily or could not afford to pay a lot of money (a minimum of about RM 600 or 6000 Baht) to obtain fake Malaysian passports. Although they had little contact with the leaders of the separatist groups, my informants were informed by the “middlemen” that the leaders were very well-placed in Malaysian society. They had obtained Malaysian citizenship as a result of their connections with influential figures in Malaysian society and they were economically well-off compared to the foot soldiers. This socio-economic hierarchy in Thai-Malay society where those at the higher end of the hierarchy hardly interact with those at the bottom is a characteristic feature of Malay society.³⁸⁾ That this feature was duplicated in the separatist organizations and ultimately led to their break-up is an interesting issue to note.

Many of these grassroots separatists surrendered to the Thai authorities after they became disillusioned with the movement. One informant lamented how he missed his family, especially his mother who lived in Thailand. Since separatism was a lost cause, he said, he decided to surrender to the Thai authorities and he was granted amnesty and reunited with his family. Today he is married to a fellow Thai Malay and lives as a fruit farmer in Pattani. Many of my informants claimed that the grassroots separatists, on discovering that life in Malaysia was not a bed of roses, decided to lay down arms and return to Thailand in order to be with their families. On returning to Thailand, many of these ex-separatists turned to legitimate work including farming and business ventures. Many of the separatists who surrendered to the Thai police were given land and money and were also enrolled in programs to train them to undertake commercial farming and animal husbandry. As such, the separatist movement lost many of the earlier grassroots separatists who had fled to Malaysia. As a result, the movement had to recruit amongst the new arrivals to Malaysia, the students as well as those who came to work illegally in Malaysia.

Many of the higher-ranking members of the separatist groups were more integrated in society. Several of them became restaurant owners and businessmen and their children had become professionals as a result of their high academic achievements in Malaysia. Among my informants were a few of these individuals who displayed a great deal of resentment for the Thai government. They displayed anger over their plights, that they could not return to Thailand as a result of having been blacklisted by the Thai government. Many of them have become what I call cyber-separatists who have taken their separatist struggle to cyber-space. The two biggest separatist groups that operate websites include PULO (www.pulo.org) and BRN (www.geocities.com/brn) although the BRN website was hacked and shut down in 2001. Many of these ideological

separatists based outside of Thailand express much nostalgic anger against the Thai state for what they view as the loss of the Malay occupied land of southern Thailand to the Thai state. While they do receive financial support from members of the movement based in Thailand as well as from Thai Malays who go to work in Malaysia, especially those who work illegally in the Thai-Muslim restaurants, also known as *tom yam* restaurants, they have had little success in arousing ideological support for separatism within Thailand itself. They have, however, managed to remind the Thai government of their presence by paying for mercenary separatists to carry out violent activities in the south, including bombing and arson.

Muslim Militants

To southern Thai-Malays, a separatist ideology no longer moves them these days but what becomes a prized commodity is Islam. Events since 9/11 have caused a greater consciousness of the Muslim ummah and Thai-Muslims have been distraught with the American war on terrorism which many Muslims see as a holy crusade against Islam. The protests against the American “invasion” of Afghanistan and the war in Iraq by Thai-Muslims who demonstrated and called for a ban on the purchase of American goods is testimony to this disaffection.

The recent incident of April 28 where 108 alleged militants were killed following attacks by Thai-Muslims on Thai security outposts in Pattani, Yala and Songkhla has been attributed to separatists influenced by Muslim militants. The father of one of the young men killed said the day before his son died, he was watching TV with his father and both were extremely upset by what they saw as the ill-treatment of Muslims in Iraq. Some forces may be at work to influence them to jihad against the Thai soldiers and police who they see as having brutalized the south. The very fact that the Krisek mosque was chosen as a place to die has much significance. Never before have young men belonging to the separatist groups willingly gone out to attack and be massacred. Some of the young men, like those from Saba Yoi district in Songkhla, were said to have cleared the land around the cemetery and told their parents to bury them together if they died in the cause of Allah. The parents refused to wash them claiming that they died as martyrs for their religion. Furthermore, they had no getaway vehicles indicating that they had planned to die. Also, security officials have reported that these victims had been on drugs just like the *mujahideens* in Afghanistan who are known to consume hashish before their mission. Who are these guys influenced by? At the present moment, there is little or no support for the old separatist movement that was led by Thai-Muslim elites who have since fled the country. As the Thai government reduced its brutality towards its Muslim population in the south, the support for the separatist movement began to wane. At the same time, it is important to note that much of the threat to the Muslims in the 1950s and 1960s was to their ethnic identity. The policies of the Thai government threatened the Malay language and their cultural norms and values. Islam faced little threat of annihilation although Malays as Muslims felt discriminated by the Thai state. Once this threat was removed, separatism was no longer a valued pursuit. Occasional attacks against the Thai state by separatists came from those who were based outside of Thailand. Within Thailand though, there was little support for separatism. However, in present times, Malay identity is no longer under threat. There is a general perception among Muslims in Thailand and

elsewhere that Muslims and Islam are being violated. At the same time, there are greater divisions within the Muslim ummah in the south, seen in terms of a small but increasing number of conversions from Sunni to Shi'ism as well as divisions between Muslims pursuing a folk-based faith influenced by their Hindu-Buddhist past (known as *kaum tua* or "old school") and those seeking a purer form of Islam based on an appeal to the Qur'an and Hadith (known as *kaum muda* or "new school"). The relationship between these various faultlines within the Muslim ummah and the current Muslim-inspired violence in the south need further investigation.

Conclusion

At a public forum at Chulalongkorn University last week, Maj. Gen. Khwanchart Klaharn, Deputy Commander of the Fourth Army Region, said the Army was aware of the possibility of renewed troubles in the region and was making preparations for it. But the January 4 raid on an Army base in Narathiwat province, which started the surge of unrest, took place before the Army could implement any preventive measure. He went on to say the Army has been putting together information, which would lead to those who were perpetrating the southern violence.

He said the cause of the violence stemmed from "misguided youth groups" and some religious teachers who wanted to bring about an independent Pattani state. He said he got this information from those who were arrested on April 28, and said the army was about to find the mastermind.³⁹⁾

From the perspective of the Thai security officials and by extension the Thai state, the perpetrators of violence in the south are Muslims and the evil ideology that serves as anchor for this violence is Islam. As seen from the above quote, the official view is that there is only one perpetrator to the violence in the south—the Muslim mastermind who controls "misguided youth" and "religious teachers." This "Muslim perpetrator/violent Islam" thesis also receives ready support among the political bigwigs in Thai society as seen in the recent televised address by the Thai Queen. In an address to about 1,200 village scouts and defense volunteers, the Queen condemned the southern Thai "brutes" who had been killing innocent people in the south.⁴⁰⁾ Making a clear reference to the fact that these southern "brutes" were Muslims, the Queen stated how killing innocent people went against the teachings of the Qur'an.⁴¹⁾

This finger-pointing at Muslims and Islam as responsible for the current violence in the south is the legacy of the history of Malay-Muslim separatism in southern Thailand. This ready-made discourse then camouflages the reality and masks the identity of other perpetrators behind the violence in the south. It holds only one group, the Muslims with a "mastermind" as responsible for all the violence happening in the region.

By doing so, it encourages more violence in the form of retaliation by a wounded, hurt, abused and harassed people. Accusations become self-fulfilling prophecies and even those who may not have anything to do with the spectacle of violence in the south may be "encouraged" to participate as seen in the following incident. Following the arrest of 2 Islamic religious school teachers in Narathiwat in June 2002 on charges of being Jemaah Islamiyah members, a fellow teacher at the school is reported to have said, "I've never heard of Jemaah Islamiyah until they grabbed my colleagues ... But if Jemaah Islamiyah can bring justice, then I'd join."⁴²⁾ Until and unless all perpetrators of the violence in the

Muslim south of Thailand are identified and their crimes acknowledged by the authorities, peace seems an unachievable goal in the near future.

Notes:

- 1) Supara Janchitfah, "Kasian Tejapira," *Violence in the Mist: Reporting on the Presence of Pain in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Kobfai, 2004), 241.
- 2) "The Ghost of Separatism Revived: The Current Status of the Separatist Movement in Thailand," Vivienne Wee ed., *Political Fault-Lines in Southeast Asia: Movements for Alternative Sovereignty in Nation-States* (London: Routledge Press, 2005).
- 3) Clive Christie, *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: decolonization, nationalism and separatism* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), 175.
- 4) The provinces used to be rich in rice, rubber, timber, coconuts and fruits, various minerals including tin, gold, wolfram, manganese and natural gas and the coastal areas were blessed with rich supplies of fish and other seafood. See T. Fraser, *Rusembilan: A Malay Fishing Village in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), 9; Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), 36; Conner Bailey & John Miksic translated, *History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani (Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani)*, by Ibrahim Syukri (pseudonym), Ohio University, Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series Number 68. However, rice cultivation is no longer a lucrative pursuit in these provinces as they have made way for shrimp farms and rubber prices have fallen since 1967 as a result of the decline in world rubber price following the challenge from cheaper synthetic rubber. See Nantawan Haemindra "The Problem of the Thai-Muslims in the Four Southern Provinces of Thailand" (Part Two), *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (1977) 8: 85–105. Catch has declined both in the Andaman and Gulf of Thailand coasts as a result of over-exploitation of the seas by heavily mechanized commercial fishing gears and the destruction of the coastal environment by shrimp farming. See O. Ruohomaki, *Fishermen No More? Livelihood and Environment in Southern Thai Maritime Villages* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1999); W. Sugannasil, "Fishing Communities in Southern Thailand: Changes and Local Responses," *Songklanakarin Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(1), (2000), 26–37.
- 5) Conner Bailey & John Miksic, *ibid*.
- 6) H. E. Wilson, "Imperialism and Islam: The Impact of "Modernisation" on the Malay-Muslims of Southern Thailand," Andrew Forbes, ed., *The Muslims of Thailand: Politics of the Malay-Speaking South* (Bihar: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 60–61; A. Suthasana, "Thai Society and the Muslim Society," Andrew Forbes, ed., *The Muslims of Thailand: Politics of the Malay-Speaking South* (Bihar: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 98, 101–102.
- 7) Tamara Loos, "Siam's Subjects: Muslims, Law and Colonialism in Southern Thailand," *SEAP Bulletin*, Winter–Spring 2004–2005, Cornell University, 11.
- 8) Winichakul Thongchai, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
- 9) Andrew Cornish, *Whose Place is This?: Malay Rubber Producers and Thai Government Officials in Yala* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press. (Studies in Contemporary Thailand No. 5), 1997), 8.
- 10) According to D. Johnston, "Bandit, Nakleng and Peasant in Rural Thai Society," *Contributions to Asian Studies*, 15, 91, *nak leng* referred to "a rogue; a rascal; a ruffian; a dishonest and unprincipled person; a knave; a scamp; a true sport." According to popular image, the *nak leng* was known for his "manly bearing and courage towards feudal lords and parents."
- 11) Interview with ex-BRN member, Pattani September 2002; interview with ex-hitman and current bodyguard, Hussein, Pattani September 2002.
- 12) The Muslim connection was alluded to because the ransom notes were written in Jawi, the Arabic-derived script used to write Malay in southern Thailand.
- 13) Desmond Ball, *The Boys in Black: The Thahan Phran (Rangers), Thailand's Para-military Border Guards*

- (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2004), 63.
- 14) See Map 1 showing the four different army regions.
 - 15) Tom Marks, *Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective* (Bangkok: White Lotus. (Studies in Contemporary Thailand No. 3), 1994), 102, 199.
 - 16) Under the government of General Prem Tinsulanond, the Prime Minister Orders No. 66/23 and 66/25 (the 66th order in the Buddhist Era Year 2523 or 1980 and 2525 or 1982) were initiated by Major General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh (current Deputy Prime Minister in the Thaksin government and former Prime Minister of Thailand from 25 November 1996 to 6 November 1997) and Major General Harn Leenanond, commander of the 4th Region Army. While the Thai government had had little success with handling its communists when it modeled its counter-insurgency efforts largely on the U.S. Army Doctrine from the Vietnam War which focused on “firepower, cordon and search and large-scale military unit employment against an elusive guerilla force.” See Virtual Information Center, “Primer: Muslim Separatism in Southern Thailand.” (Honolulu: USPACOM, 2002). Thailand decided to look for alternatives in the successful British model in Malaya. Modeled after the aims of the CPM, the two orders set forth “a politically-driven strategy to meet the communists.” See T. Marks, *Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective*, 198. To be effective against the communists the Thai government decided that poverty and corruption needed to be eliminated (see Primer, 2002) and so gave primacy to these efforts.
 - 17) “From the Jungle, Separatists Turn a New Leaf.” *Bangkok Post*, 27 September 2001.
 - 18) The Border Patrol Police had companies in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat and was charged with looking after security in the border areas. See Desmond Ball, *The Boys in Black: The Thahan Phran (Rangers), Thailand's Para-military Border Guards* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2004), 108.
 - 19) CPM 43 had a combined staff of civilian officers, police and military officers and controlled a combined force consisting of 800 Marines and 900 Rangers from the 41st and 43rd Regiments. See Ball, 108.
 - 20) Ball, 96.
 - 21) Ball, 98.
 - 22) Ball, 101, 103.
 - 23) Ball, 109.
 - 24) In May 2001, two army sergeants were arrested in Songkhla for trying to sell ammunition (dynamite, hand grenades, landmines, ammo and bullets) worth 280,000 Baht to an Acehnese separatist. See “Soldiers had ammo for Aceh Rebels,” *Bangkok Post*, 11 March 2001; “PM wants probe into Aceh cache,” *Bangkok Post*, 12 May 2001; “Two Army Officers Linked to Arms Seizure,” *Bangkok Post*, 15 May 2001.
 - 25) Ball, 108.
 - 26) Quoted in Ball, 108–9.
 - 27) *ibid.*
 - 28) “Dead or Alive, Just Catch Them or Face the Music, says Thaksin,” *Bangkok Post*, 1 May 2003.
 - 29) For one example, see Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), 236.
 - 30) Phongpaichit and Baker, 236.
 - 31) *ibid.*
 - 32) Katherine Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty: An Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 81–111.
 - 33) Phongpaichit and Baker, 8.
 - 34) Phongpaichit and Baker, 102.
 - 35) “Plague of Terrorism ruins Thai Economic Growth,” *Bangkok Post*, 18 January 1998.
 - 36) “Separatism Breakaway Movement Wanes,” *Bangkok Post*, 27 September 1999.
 - 37) Dorairajoo, “The Ghost of Separatism.”
 - 38) J. M. Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya* (London: Athlone Press, 1958); Dorairajoo, “No Fish in the Sea: Thai-Malay Tactics of Negotiation at a Time of Scarcity,” Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2002.
 - 39) Janchitfah, 239–240.

- 40) "Queen Condemns Southern 'Brutes,'" *Bangkok Post*, 24 April 2005.
- 41) "Heed Her Majesty's message, turn in terrorists, premier says," *The Nation*, 25 April 2005.
- 42) *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2003.